

# Arts & Entertainment

## Mad Forest documents Romanian struggle

By Kelly Murdoch-Kitt  
Old Gold and Black Reporter

The Romanian Revolution has come to the university. In fact, it has been on campus since Nov. 6, in the form of Caryll Churchill's poignant and complex drama, *Mad Forest*, now playing on the Mainstage at Scales Fine Arts Center.

Churchill's play, derived from her visit to Romania shortly after the overthrow and execution of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, is an honest depiction of Romanian life at the time of this revolutionary turmoil.

The story unfolds through a company of 12 actors portraying two families — one blue-collar, one white-collar — and a number of other roles. There are more than 50 characters (no small feat for a three-act play), and each one contributes to the audience's understanding of the revolution's impact on life in Romania.

The intermediate act, "December," is almost a slice of raw documentary, with the actors representing a diverse group of Romanians who give first-hand commentary on the circumstances of the revolution.

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Camelia Pascu

As far as first-hand accounts are concerned, director Sharon Andrews, an instructor of theater, had excellent resources for her production. She consulted Camelia and Sorin Pascu, two Romanian refugees who live in Winston-Salem.

The Pascus, both engineers, attend the same church as Lisa Weller, the costume room supervisor, and she recruited them to help with the show. They served as a similar point of reference for *Mad Forest* when the North Carolina School of the Arts staged it a few years ago.

The couple has also helped provide both cultural and historical subtexts for the scenes. "We talked about what was the political situation like at that time and what we have experienced during the Revolution," Camelia Pascu said.

The Pascus have been in communication not only with Andrews, but also scenic and lighting designer Jonathan Christman, a production designer, Doug Brown, a technical adviser and with the actors themselves. Andrews, the Pascus and the actors remained after the Nov. 7



Photos by Kelly Murdoch-Kitt/Old Gold and Black

**Seniors Emily Sparkman and Drew Droege, above, are two of the actors who learned their lines in Romanian for the performance of *Mad Forest*. Freshman Joe Gera, right, marries sophomore Sona Tatoyan and senior Droege in a Romanian wedding ceremony.**



performance for an information session. The Pascus discussed their experience in Romania, their work with the production, and there was an open forum for audience questions.

Actors seniors Kourtney Vahle and Heather McClain took the opportunity to explain the Pascus' involvement with the acting company: One of the many challenges in presenting this play is that there are

many lines spoken in Romanian. Each scene is introduced in Romanian; there are also songs, a poem, and the final scene of the play — all

spoken in Romanian. According to Andrews, this "helps to remind the audience of the context of the action."

Although the language works well as a theatrical device, learning it was a different story, which is where the Pascus entered the picture.

"They made tapes for us of all of our lines," Vahle told the Nov. 7 audience. "Then we just had to listen and learn them," she said.

"We also learned the song from the tape and from seeing it written phonetically," McClain said.

"I think everyone just went around constantly listening to their tapes and repeating their lines. Ask any of our roommates — I know I was driving mine crazy!" Vahle said.

The Pascus' intensive language lessons have paid off: The actors deliver all of their lines, Romanian and otherwise, with absolute ease. It is important to the play as a whole that they have mastered these details. *Mad Forest* comprises about 30 scenes, most of which vary dramatically from one to the next. Every element of production needed to be fine-tuned to ensure the play's fluidity. =

Christman's set is a concrete example of *Mad Forest's* frequent metamorphoses: At any moment, its network of platforms and many mobile scenic elements can be transformed from a city street corner to a countryside pasture, from an upper class dining room to a hospital ward.

Notwithstanding the personal nature of the subject matter, Camelia Pascu believes that the style of the production alone makes *Mad Forest* worth seeing. "*Mad Forest* is an extremely ingenious play," Pascu said. "The innovative and quick-paced way the scenes flow is very refreshing."

The play also holds obvious personal meaning for the couple. "The author of this play has managed to condense 30 years of our life into two and a half hours. There is a lesson to be learned out of this play," she said. "This lesson can be summarized using an old Romanian saying: 'If you let them take one of your fingers, they will end up taking your whole arm.' In other words, if you ... make one compromise with your conscience, you will end up by losing your soul."

She said all of the play's characters must make such compromises and sacrifices. "It becomes obvious that they have paid a heavy price for doing so," she said.

"(The characters) are left without a direction to follow, without trust in God or themselves, without principles and without hope. As someone that has seen this play done before, I can say that the result is outstanding." *Mad Forest* continues through Nov. 15. The performances are at 8 p.m. Nov. 12-14 with a 2 p.m. matinee Nov. 15. Tickets are available through the theater box office at Ext. 5295.

## Faculty celebrates American music

### American, European traditions evident

By Robert Shaw  
Old Gold and Black Reviewer

As a part of American Music Week, the department of music faculty sponsored an evening of music for composers from this country. As music programmers continue to attempt to bridge the gap between the listening public and great music, they are finding that great indigenous music must find artistic recognition

with the public. Personal identification with the great music from one's own culture is often, even usually, the entryway to finding profound meaning in the larger artistic world of which that music is a part. The goals are neither exclusive of each other nor competitive with each other. Rather, coming to understand music as purely music and music as an integral part of one's particular place can reinforce each other.

The pieces in the Nov. 2 recital reflected a wide variety along this spectrum of artistic genesis.

On the one hand, the "Four Songs" by Amy Cheney Beach from the late 19th century and the "Five Pieces" by Horatio Parker were essentially European in conception, with subtle touching by an American brush.

On the other end of the spectrum was the short cycle of African-American art songs and the selections from *Porgy and Bess* by the quintessential American composer, George Gershwin.

Caught in the middle was Persichetti's "Pastoral," the most musically interesting piece on the recital. Played by Opus 5, a wind quintet made up partly of faculty, the piece was well constructed in the tradition of European technical excellence and subtlety. However, Persichetti's work also embodied a certain distinctly American fiber that was more than color around the edges.

This piece was of American conception, not merely in an American style, as I believe Beach's songs, sung by soprano Teresa Radomski, an associate professor of music, were.

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Opus 5 is a real asset to the university and Winston-Salem communities, and their performance of the Persichetti and Gershwin was a great way to end a fantastic program. These five wonderful musicians brought to the stage the technical equivalent of five highly trained surgeons married with the inspiration of muses.

The other piece that possessed some really wonderful musical material was H.F. Mells' "I've Got Religion" in the African-American art song cycle sung by tenor Richard Heard, an instructor of music. Mells certainly possessed a wonderful craft, and Heard never fails to blow me away with his effortless and masterful style and musicianship.

Parker's "Five Pieces," while beautifully played by Peter Kairoff, an associate professor of music, did disappoint in the ingenuity of musical material overall. I think the nature of Parker's work highlights the continual struggle that American composers often have in coming to grips with the mindboggling heights that European music has achieved.

Not that some have not done it, but many more have failed in the trying. I am reminded of a quote of Maurice Ravel's to the young Gershwin, who wanted to study the European style: "Why be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?"

Parker, of course, was no Gershwin, so perhaps his looks across the ocean were somewhat of a crutch. Perhaps the compartments into which we try to put composers does an injustice to Parker.

The great success in the performance caliber of these musicians was certainly in full force. Those who missed the concert can still come to appreciate their extraordinary musicianship through the records they have made.

All of the performers except for Opus 5 have recently made CDs, all of which have come to notable critical success and are available in the college bookstore.

## Apt Pupil raises issues of hatred

By Rad Hallman  
Old Gold and Black Reviewer

*Apt Pupil*, Bryan Singer's follow-up to the *Usual Suspects*, is a taut psychological thriller about the bizarre relationship between an overly curious boy and an old Nazi war criminal. Based on a novella by Stephen King (from *Different Seasons*, the same collection that brought us *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Stand By Me*), *Apt Pupil* is tightly directed with a strong cast and a very clean visual presentation that makes the underlying evil of the story all the more frightening.

The film wastes no time in getting to the meat of the plot, the relationship between Todd Bowden (Brad Renfro) and Kurt Dussander (Ian McKellan). Todd discovers that Dussander, known as Danker, is a Nazi who escaped indictment 30 years ago by moving to sunny Southern California. Using his knowledge of the Holocaust as a blackmail threat against Dussander, Todd forces him to describe his role in the mass murders.

Though hesitant at first, Dussander succumbs to Todd's schoolboy barrage of curious questions and begins to describe graphically his experiences in the death camps.

These question-and-answer sessions and Todd's gift of an authentic Nazi uniform serve to rekindle old fires of hate in

Dussander, and he begins to turn the tables on Todd until they have each other caught in a tangle of blackmail and hidden agendas.

As the plot progresses, *Apt Pupil* becomes a study in horrific gamesmanship. This film will probably not excite those viewers who hope for the usual bloodbath and terrible acting when they see King's name attached to the previews.

Through sharp photography and the same sort of technical directing that warranted praise for *The Usual Suspects*, Singer shows us the psychological battle between a rather evil-minded boy and his elderly counterpart.

Part of the strength of *Apt Pupil* arises from the performances of the two leading actors. McKellan brings a vast stage career to the screen and uses his talents impressively to portray a man who cannot quell the fires of hatred. Although his German accent might be a little heavy on the mustard, he depicts a man whose spirit is willing and diabolical, but, of course, his aging flesh is weak.

Renfro does his part to keep up with the complexity of McKellan but cannot escape the fact that his character is a rather one-note creation. This note, however, is an interesting one because of the capacity for evil that this teenager possesses.

*Apt Pupil* is a curious film, too, because it gives us two main characters who are

both despicable in their actions and attitudes. However, their evil is endearing in that we as the audience want to know what it is that fuels their hatred, and when we are left with fewer answers than questions, the enigmatic characteristics of human evil are apparent and perhaps as shocking as the evil itself.

David Schwimmer's supporting role as Todd's guidance counselor is well-played, and he becomes a slightly horrific character in his own life of goofy maxims and Volvo-driven security.

Supporting characters and the uses of visual scenery to denote the separation of worlds between Todd's suburban life and Dussander's darkly hermetic existence make *Apt Pupil* an interesting film throughout rather than only a cinematic standoff between two bookends of hate.

Perhaps Singer did not adequately portray the actual horror of the Holocaust with his flashback and dream sequences including a bizarre hallucination in the high school locker room, but this film is not only about horrors of the past.

*Apt Pupil* portrays a capacity for hate fueled evil in the minds and hearts of a man and a boy.

That this evil can be stoked with little provocation and without any real basis for the extent of hatred is its most horrific aspect and the most terrifying suggestion of *Apt Pupil*.



Courtesy of www.movieweb.com

**Ian McKellan and Brad Renfro bring together two eras of Hollywood in *Apt Pupil* in a standoff between old vengeance and present-day punishment.**